



Snow Leopard – a rare multiple sighting (All photos taken on the 2016 tour & by Mike Watson).

SNOW LEOPARD SPECIAL: LADAKH

1 – 14 MARCH 2016

LEADERS: MIKE WATSON & JIGMET DADUL.

OUR FOURTH VISIT TO THE MOUNTAINS OF LADAKH IN SEARCH OF SNOW LEOPARDS was another success and resulted in six sightings, involving at least five different cats and including a female with two fully-grown cubs as well as an ibex hunt! Whilst we enjoyed some nice scope views the leopards were too far away for anything other than DSLR record shots this time, however, everyone felt very privileged to simply set eyes on this beautiful cat in its spectacular natural habitat not just once but six times! Other mammalian highlights were: three sightings of Grey (or Tibetan) Wolf involving as many as 16 individuals (although there may have been some duplication); unusually close views of Siberian Ibex; numerous Urial, Ladakh's endemic 'red sheep'; any amount of Blue Sheep (or Bharal), the Snow Leopard's favourite prey, as well as Woolly Hare, another hardy alpine inhabitant. Billed as a joint Birdquest/Wild Images tour, our birders were happy with a good selection of Himalayan specialities including: Himalayan Snowcock; Lammergeier; Himalayan Griffon Vulture; Golden Eagle; Ibisbill; Solitary Snipe (at least three); Hill and Snow Pigeons; Red-billed and Alpine Choughs; Gldenstdt's Redstart; Tibetan Snowfinch; Robin and Brown Accentors; Brandt's and Plain Mountain Finches; Streaked Rosefinch and Red-fronted Serin. A vagrant Ferruginous Duck almost fell victim to a young



Ibisbill by the River Indus, one of the world's most charismatic shorebirds (Mike Watson).

Northern Goshawk in the Indus Valley and a *cashmeriensis* form White-throated Dipper of the rare dark morph *sordidus* was probably our most significant avian sighting. As if this was not enough Ladakh's jaw-dropping high altitude mountain desert scenery took our breath away (as well as the severe lack of oxygen up there!) and the truly delightful Ladakhis themselves made our stay a once-in-a-lifetime pleasant experience. They are definitely front-runners for the title 'nicest people in the world'!

Another very welcome bonus of a visit to Ladakh (weather permitting) is the fabulous view over the Karakoram mountain range on the morning flight from Delhi to Leh, Ladakh's municipal centre (from the left side of the aircraft, window seats ahead of the wing 1A-7A best). The second highest peak in the world, K2 8611m and three other 8000-ers were clearly visible: Gasherbrum I 8080m; Broad Peak 8051m and Gasherbrum II 8035m. The Karakoram range also has 30 peaks over 7000m and is the most spectacular mountain range on earth. Lying to the south of the Karakoram and on the edge of the Tibetan plateau Ladakh's peaks are lower but still include the impressive pyramid peak of Stok Kangri, which dominates the view over the Indus Valley from Leh and at 6153m is easily higher than anything in Europe! Landing amongst at least one million Indian army installations in Leh you are immediately struck by how little oxygen there is at 3500m altitude although at least the dry cold early morning air feels warmer than the equivalent air temperature back home. There are signs in the airport that all foreign visitors should rest for at least 24 hours on arrival and everyone usually feels some adverse effects of the high altitude for the first few days in the form of mild headache, disturbed sleep and breathlessness. Winding our way past red-cloaked Buddhist monks, ethnic Tibetan folks spinning prayer wheels and Leh's day-sleeping market dogs we eventually reached our cosy little hotel tucked away uphill in the backstreets of the tourist quarter, not far from a large frozen pond that doubles as Leh's outdoor ice hockey rink.

Ladakh is connected to India by two main highways and to Pakistan by another, however, all of these routes become blocked by snow, making it effectively a winter island. A frantic period of stocking up everything from petrol to foodstuffs takes place before the first snows of autumn although fresh fruit and vegetables are flown in daily during the winter. As you can imagine these luxury supplies are therefore expensive. The town's population is more than 27,500 and this number is swelled by tourists during the spring and summer and particularly during religious festivals such as the Dalai Lama's occasional visits. Leh has long been a stopover on an important trade route along the Indus Valley, one of the world's most ancient civilizations, with goods carried



Thiksey Monastery (above) and prayer flags for the departed at Sindhu ghats (below) (Mike Watson).



The Indus Valley from Thiksey Monastery (Mike Watson).

including salt, grain, cashmere wool, cannabis resin, indigo and silk. More recently, since partition and owing to the friction between India and its sibling rival Pakistan (and also the looming threat of China) this border region has become militarized with obtrusive army installations almost everywhere. Happily though, it is still possible to 'get away from it all' not too far into the mountain valleys. One irritating aspect of the military presence is Air India's apparent readiness to make unannounced last minute changes to their flight schedules as well as to 'bump' passengers off their flights in favour of military personnel. Another reason (in addition to the important need for time to acclimatize) to aim to arrive in Leh several days early!

Once gathered on a sunny morning at our hotel and served with the first of over 100 cups of tea on the tour (masala chai please!) we settled in for a while before our first excursion. A Cinereous (or Grey) Tit called as it moved through the poplar trees in the hotel garden and magpies chattered nearby. The Indus Valley is a main migration route and therefore provides the biggest diversity of birdlife here, albeit still poor in comparison to lands south of the mountains. We had been watching Ibisbills by the Indus for several days leading up to the tour and were pleased to find one still present in its usual feeding area along the stony banks of the sacred river when the official tour start time came. This monotypic shorebird is one of the most enigmatic birds of the Himalayas and is unusual in having purple legs when breeding and it also lacks a hind toe. After a while the rather skittish Ibisbill flew off up stream out of reach in our limited time available and we moved on.

Also here a couple of Goosanders helped get the trip list off to a start, White Wagtails of the Asian form *personata* 'Masked Wagtail' fed along the riverbank along with the Green Sandpipers, Common Greenshank and Common Redshank also wintering here. The first of many Gldenstdt's (or White-winged) Redstarts were also noted. The commonest passerine in the Indus Valley in winter they are simply everywhere, adorning the Tibetan Buckthorn bushes that line the river's course. A small group of House Sparrows were our only ones of the tour! Leaving the prayer flag strewn iron bridge at Choglamsar behind we headed upstream past Sindhu burning ghats to Shey, where in the shadow of the imposing palace we had a quick look at its fish ponds. During a shameless 'list-padding' stop we added handful of duck species in a few minutes: Common Teal; Gadwall; Eurasian Wigeon; Mallard and Northern Pintail as well as Grey Heron, Common Moorhen and Eurasian Coot. The ponds and their surrounding marshes here have hosted some interesting vagrants over the years such as Great Bittern and are always worth a look.

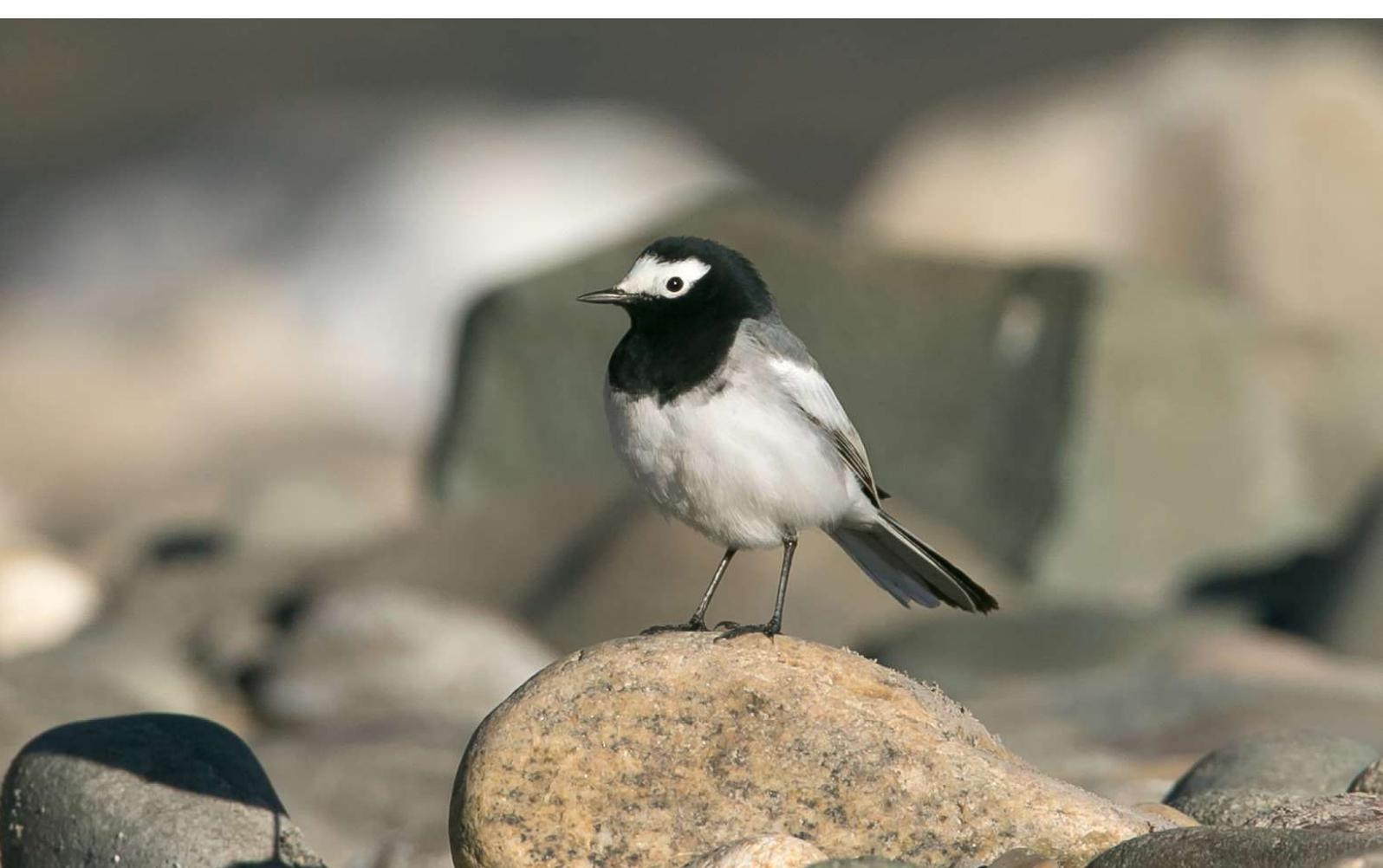


Ferruginous Duck near Shey - a rare visitor to the Indus Valley in winter (Mike Watson).

It was time to move on again, passing by the tens of white-washed chortens at Shey, to another area of the Indus Valley, a quiet flood channel of the main river, where, once we had cleared the folks cleaning their cars in its waters we found a few interesting birds. The highlight was a smart mahogany-plumaged drake Ferruginous Duck, which narrowly avoided falling victim to a first year Northern Goshawk that swooped down in front of us in an attempt to whack the off course duck. Ferruginous Duck is an uncommon visitor to Ladakh and Pfister 2004 lists only two records for Ladakh, although we are aware that it has been seen again since then. We were happy to share this one with our friends Zoothera Birding Tours. Smart Gldenstdt's Redstarts were much in evidence again, as were Green Sandpipers but unfortunately there was no sign of the much-desired Solitary Snipe we had found here the previous day, or any Black-throated Thrushes. They would both have to wait until later. However, a Brown Accentor was some consolation and a new bird for most of us. As the sun dipped lower in the winter sky we continued east along the valley a little way to the impressive Thiksey Monastery.

Tikse, Tiksey or Thiksey is a gompa or fortress monastery affiliated to the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism and was established in the fifteenth century. It is the largest monastery in the Indus Valley and is similar in construction to the Potala Palace in Lhasa. Climbing up through its twelve storeys and many stairs we enjoyed some time exploring in the evening sun, admiring the spectacular view over the Indus Valley from its roof. The monastery is presently home to some 60 monks and also recently some nuns too. We were also able to enter the assembly room with its intricate wall hangings (thankas) and murals before it was time to leave and had back to Leh at the end of an eventful first day.

A pre-breakfast snipe twitch resulted in flight views of a Solitary Snipe flushed from a field near Shey where our Zoothera friends had seen it the previous day. A small flock of Black-throated Thrushes were taking the morning sun atop a poplar near the Indus and there were plenty of Gldenstdt's Redstarts about as usual. After breakfast we headed west along the Indus Valley into the mountains. Passing many army camps we climbed the switchbacks above the ancient fortified village of Basgo and a wide moonscape desert vista opened up before us, Basgo Plains. This area is particularly good for wolves and although we were not in luck we did manage to see plenty of Urial, Ladakh's endemic smart reddish sheep species on the journey. Urial's prefer to graze lower than either Blue Sheep or Ibex at 3,000-4,000m, which puts them in competition with man as well as at risk from Ladakh's growing feral dog population. The total population is estimated at around only 1,500 individuals and it is considered vulnerable by IUCN. A fine young Golden Eagle here was the first of many



Güldenstädt's Redstart (above) & Masked Wagtail (below), two common passerines of the Indus Valley (Mike Watson).



Urial near Nimmu in the Indus Valley (Mike Watson).

sightings on the tour and several Lammergeiers were tallied as we continued west towards our destination, the remote Ulley Valley. We passed by the confluence of the Zanskar River with the Indus and thanks to the military presence the roads in this area are in remarkably good condition.

After we left the main Indus gorge Jigmet decided that we ought to walk a short section, where he showed us our first signs of Snow Leopard, some scrapes and scent-marked rocks by the wayside. We were in Shan country at last. In fact Snow Leopards occasionally even cross the Indus near Leh so they can literally be anywhere, although, unlike their Indian urban cousins, they usually choose to avoid people of course. Eventually our winding road took us to Ulley and we began to climb what seemed like one million switchbacks, pausing to help a car stuck whilst crossing a mountain stream, before we reached our homestay, perched high at the head of the valley with commanding views of the skyline ridges all around. Breathtaking was an apt description as up here at 4150m there is even less oxygen and every activity left us gasping for air. Fortunately there was not too much to do on our first afternoon except to familiarize ourselves with our new surroundings, including a delightful traditional home dining room, spacious sleeping quarters and the dreaded composting toilet, which was actually a more amusing than terrifying prospect. The mountain ridges surrounding the homestay were definitely Shan country with a good track record of producing sightings of the cat and its prey, Siberian Ibex in this instance.

We could hardly have hoped for a faster Snow Leopard sighting! Within a couple of hours of scanning the distant hillsides, to everyone's delight (and especially hers) Fiona Ayerst spotted our first Snow Leopard, making its way over a high saddle on the skyline. That was a very exciting moment and after some minutes of tension passed, it reappeared and everyone could set eyes on their first of this most beautiful of cats. Thanks Fiona! Until fairly recently seeing a Snow Leopard was an almost impossible dream for most westerners but now, thanks to the amazing organization of our ground team following many years of them getting to know the movements of the cats, it is pretty much guaranteed. The only question now is what will the range of a sighting be and for how long? Like all of our views on this visit to Ladakh, this one was quite distant but still good enough to appreciate the leopard's face pattern (although not quite eye colour), the rosettes on its coat and its amazing long tail, almost as long as its body, which it uses both to maintain balance when chasing prey down the steep mountainsides and also as a furry shawl to wrap around its face to keep warm in the depths of winter. Having a 10cm thick coat of fur also helps at that time of year! We watched as the leopard picked its



Siberian (or Asiatic) Ibex, Ulley Valley (Mike Watson).

way through the rocks along the ridge line, stopping to scent mark its territory along the way, sometimes only its super-long tail could be seen waving above the rocks. Incidentally both males and females scent mark so this was not of use when contemplating the sex of this cat. There is nothing like hitting the target at the first time of asking and this sighting set the tone for the rest of the tour. Although most of us struggled to acclimatize (some more so than others) we felt relieved that we had at least seen a Snow Leopard now! It is incredible to think that Peter Matthieson never saw a live, wild one yet his 1978 book '*The Snow Leopard*' remains a classic read on the subject (or lack of it).

Siberian Ibex are more easily seen to the north of the Indus Valley and we enjoyed daily sightings of magnificent male ibexes with bright white saddles on their winter coats, long beards and spectacular knobbed horns. One day a batchelor group of six was feeding lower downslope than the majority of them and, with a little stalking, allowed fairly close approach. This was apparently quite unusual for this normally quite shy animal. Again gasping for air, we made a lung-bursting hike to get closer to them and were delighted when they simply stayed put and offered some great photo opportunities against an attractive snowy background of mountain shrubs. Large males can weigh in at over 130kg and their sabre-like knobbed horns can reach a length of almost 1.5m! Siberian Ibex are the longest and heaviest members of the genus *Capra* and are only surpassed in shoulder height by the impressive Markhor.

Bird life in Ulley Valley was very sparse indeed, especially at the altitude of our homestay. Lammergeiers and Himalayan Vultures were a common sight gliding across the valley and a pair of Golden Eagles often perched on prominent rocky outcrops. A pair of Hill Pigeons would make occasional visits to the roof top where we were all assembled on scanning duty and on one day a Common Kestrel flew up the valley for Mike only. Eurasian Magpies were ever present, their scolding calls echoing across the hillside and every now and then a flock of choughs would pass by, invariably Red-billed but we did see one flock of Alpines. Small land birds were few and far between and up at the homestay only Brown Accentor and Red-fronted Serin put in an appearance. A stray Masked Wagtail was seen on one day but downhill at the next homestay there was a little more variety. A handful of colourful Robin Accentors were here as well as some Streaked Rosefinches, although sadly no red males. Paul had a Brown Dipper in a mountain stream on his way back from a hike and a few Gldenstdt's Redstarts had already returned from their winter quarters. Without a doubt the strangest sightings were of a couple of large flocks of Great Cormorants on separate mornings, using the valley as a flyway.



Siberian (or Asiatic) Ibex males at Ulley Valley (Mike Watson).



The upper Ulley Valley (Mike Watson).

However, the highlight of our time in this idyllic mountain setting was a series of four sightings of Snow Leopard on consecutive days! We think this was probably the same female on the first three days. Following a similar course each day she would appear in late afternoon high on the skyline ridge to the east of the homestay and then walk along it, scent-marking as she went and taking around 20 minutes to cover a distance of a kilometre or so before she disappeared over the ridge and out of sight. On the fourth morning we heard news that one of our spotters had seen a pair of Snow Leopards, no doubt sibling cubs disappearing into a rocky area just downhill from us. We all raced down there and took up position while Changchuk searched the area, however, the grey ghost is difficult to find if it does not want to be found and he drew a blank. Norbu from the homestay downhill checked the same area again later and decided that the mother and her two cubs had moved further upslope and away. After a short rest at midday we resumed our vigil in the afternoon and eventually one of the leopards was spotted walking quite high up in the rocks above the area where the cubs were last seen. It gained height through the smooth sandstone rocks and paused on a prominent lookout... where it was joined by the two cubs. Cubs is probably stretching it a little as they were both pretty much fully grown and they were surely soon to leave their mother, as suggested by her scenting behavior. They were a magnificent sight nevertheless, although DSLR users were left wishing they were a lot closer.

As the evening shadows grew longer we noticed that the mother was heading along a ridge in the direction of the main ibex herd so we all staggered around a large rocky outcrop and got in position in case something happened. Fairly soon afterwards Jigmet's eagle eyes picked up a Snow Leopard in a rocky pile behind a small group of young ibex high on the scree slope. The hunt was on! After what seemed like an eternity the leopard finally made its move but ran sideways along the rocks first before heading straight at the ibex. This gave them a nice headstart, which was enough to keep them all a little ahead of the charging cat as they tore down the scree slope in the gathering gloom. The chase was unsuccessful and the leopard sloped off into the darkness and the terrified ibex trotted across the hillside to graze somewhere else out of reach of their nemesis. We think that one of the cubs might have jumped the gun as surely an experienced mother like this one would not make such a mistake?

The next highlight of Ulley was the Grey (or Tibetan) Wolves that put in a regular morning appearance. We saw 16 over three days but they were probably all members of the eight strong pack that lives in the valley, spend-



The Ulley Grey Wolf pack and below, the rugged terrain of the Ulley Valley, note the rock pedestals (Mike Watson).



Snow Leopard – the ‘Grey Ghost of the Mountain’, Ulley Valley (Mike Watson)..

ing the day in the upper reaches but descending at night in search of food. There was a dead horse below Norbu’s homestay that we thought was attracting them. It had been collected from an army camp in the valley where it had apparently died from over-eating (!) and it was now being recycled by magpies, Golden Eagles and Lammergeiers... and probably the wolf pack. The wolves were in fine condition with thick winter coats, really beautiful animals. It was also amazing how they effortlessly covered the vast ground between the lower ridges of the valley and the high pastures, legs constantly moving but their bodies appeared almost motionless as they powered along one after the other, all neatly spaced out across the hillside. It is nice to see wolves in a place where they are not persecuted. In fact the mountains of Ladakh are one of the least interfered with ecosystems. They still have all their apex predators remaining, including a few bears, all allowed to co-exist owing to the Buddhist beliefs of the villagers and also lately thanks to some help from Jigmet’s Snow Leopard Conservancy who help to provide secure community night shelters for their livestock as well as operating an insurance scheme for losses to Snow Leopards and Wolves.

During our stay at Ulley we also hiked to the head of the amazing Spango Valley, a quiet and uninhabited tributary that often produces Snow Leopard sightings. It was very quiet here in the afternoon sun apart from a handful of Chukar, a couple of Brown Accentors and the ever-present Golden Eagles and Lammergeiers overhead. This was once the hunting preserve of the King of Ladakh, whose boundary walls can still be seen here. Unfortunately we did not manage to find anything of note but Mike had a Wallcreeper fly over only be lost in the vastness of the rocky valley.

After four nights we said goodbye to Ulley and made our way down into the Indus Valley once more, passing at least one million Chukars en route. We passed by Spitok Monastery, a Goosander on the River Indus itself and lots more Gldenstdt’s Redstarts on our way to Stok, the present day residence of the Ladakhi royal family. Here we met our pony man and decanted our baggage for the journey to our tented camp in the adjacent Hemis National Park, our home for the next seven nights. Only partly acclimatized we trudged up the frozen Stok Valley for about one and a half hours (we could do this walk in half the time after a few days!) and settled into our camp. The camp was set on the abandoned terraced fields of a small homestead on the valley floor, just above the frozen river, which we could hear flowing under the ice. It was not long before Urgain and our camp crew arrived laden with cooking equipment. They quickly cut a hole in the ice to access the water and soon had some tea on the go again. They are the unsung heroes of our tour, always smiling, always on time



Stok Valley scenes, Hemis NP (Mike Watson).



Eurasian Eagle-Owl, Hemis NP (Mike Watson).

and always with a nice hot cup of tea to keep us going. The 6am wake up cup of tea and biscuits served to our tents was particularly welcome! It was quite incredible how they managed to conjure up so many delicious meals in very basic conditions. I had been curious about exactly how cold it would be here at night and was pleased to record a minimum of only minus eight Celsius, which is about ten degrees warmer than I was expecting. We experienced an unusually mild spell during our visit with less snow cover than normal and whilst this made conditions comfortable, it undoubtedly hampered our ability to track leopard movements.

In the end we had two Snow Leopard encounters in Stok and both of them distant animals walking skyline ridges but one of them had crossed the stream near our camp after dark and so was a near miss. However, we were all still very happy with our tally and Hemis is one of the most starkly beautiful places I have ever visited so to spend time camping here was a pure delight. Birds were again few and far between, although they did include a couple of Solitary Snipe sightings, one of which was tracked down by Magnus to a rocky slope of the valley and afforded some nice scope views. Otherwise Stok produced similar bird sightings to Ulley and new species included: Snow Pigeon (two very distant birds scoped high up in the valley); a White-throated Dipper of the rare dark morph *sordidus* of the *cashmeriensis* form, which had a brown-streaked breast where it ought to be pure white (thanks for the research Max!); a flock of around 30 Tibetan Snowfinches that flew over us high up in the valley; up to around 300 Brandt's Mountain Finches and at least three Plain Mountain Finches (there may have been more amongst the Brandt's flock but they were so far away it was only possible to identify the dark-headed male Brandt's) and best of all a fine Eurasian Eagle-Owl that gave itself up one day, sitting in the open on a cliff face by the old Stok Fortress. This species lacks the dark facial disk border of Indian Eagle Owl, by which it is replaced from the Himalayan foothills southwards. We eventually hiked up to around 4300m ASL in Stok, the highest we managed on the tour and well on the way to Stok Kangri itself.

The mammalian highlight of Hemis, after the Snow Leopards of course, was the Bharal (or Blue Sheep). Sheep everywhere was the norm here and the fact that they were sometimes down in the valley bottom gave us hope that they were lure the leopard down too, despite the relatively light snow cover. The males are about half the weight of an ibex but still very impressive, with their black tights and crazy handlebar moustache horns. We enjoyed numerous encounters with them, including some jumping and fighting. There are certainly plenty in Hemis NP to keep the leopards going for some time to come!



Blue Sheep (or Bharal), ram below (Mike Watson)..



Blue Sheep, Hemis NP (Mike Watson).



Ibisbill, Choglamsar - the sacred waters of the Indus turned rose gold in the evening sunlight (Mike Watson).

Animal of the trip (as voted for by the group)

1. Snow Leopard
2. Grey Wolf
3. Blue Sheep
4. Siberian Ibex
5. Eurasian Eagle-Owl
6. Solitary Snipe
7. Ibisbill
8. Himalayan Griffon Vulture
9. Lammergeier
10. Woolly Hare



White-throated Dipper of the rare dark morph sordidus (Mike Watson).

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF BIRD SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). **IOC World Bird Names**. This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>.

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species). Conservation threat categories and information are taken from Threatened Birds of the World, BirdLife International's magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world's avifauna, and updates on the BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>

E = Endangered, V = Vulnerable, NT = Near Threatened, DD = Data Deficient.

Gadwall *Anas strepera* Three at Shey Ponds.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* Three at Shey Ponds.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Around 30 at Shey Ponds.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* Two drakes at Shey Ponds.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* A drake at Shey Ponds.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* A drake on a flood channel of the Indus near Shey.

Common Merganser (Goosander) *Mergus merganser* Two on the Indus at Choglamsar and another at Spitok.

Himalayan Snowcock ◊ *Tetraogallus himalayensis* Daily sightings at both Ulley and Hemis NP.

Chukar Partridge (Chukar) *Alectoris chukar* Small coveys seen throughout in the hills.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Three at Shey Ponds.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Two flocks of c.40 and c.20 over Ulley Valley was unusual.

Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier) *Gypaetus barbatus* A total of 31 sightings but invariably distant.

Himalayan Vulture (H Griffon V) *Gyps himalayensis* A total of nine sightings including one first year bird at Hemis NP.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* Commonly seen in the mountains, a total of 27 sightings.



Above Hill Pigeon and below, Eurasian Wren of the dark subspecies neglectus (Mike Watson).



A typical view of the shy Solitary Snipe, Hemis NP (Mike Watson).

- Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus* One for some en route to Ulley Valley. (NL)
- Northern Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis* A first year bird, which tried to catch the Ferruginous Duck near Shey!
- Black Kite (Black-eared K)** *Milvus [migrans] lineatus* One at Leh.
- Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* A couple at Shey Ponds.
- Eurasian Coot (Common C)** *Fulica atra* Up to around 10 at Shey Ponds.
- Ibisbill** ◊ *Ibidorhyncha struthersii* One on the River Indus at Choglamsar Bridge.
- Solitary Snipe** ◊ *Gallinago solitaria* A single near the Indus near Shey and two sightings in Hemis NP.
- Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus* One on the River Indus at Choglamsar Bridge.
- Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* A flock of six on the River Indus at Choglamsar Bridge.
- Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* Four on the River Indus near Shey.
- Rock Dove (R Pigeon)** *Columba livia* Common near habitation in the Indus Valley.
- Hill Pigeon** ◊ *Columba rupestris* Noted at Ulley Valley and Hemis NP.
- Snow Pigeon** ◊ *Columba leuconota* Two in Hemis NP but sadly rather distant.
- Eurasian Eagle-Owl** *Bubo bubo* One in Hemis NP. Ssp *hemachalanus*.
- Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus* One noted in Ulley Valley.
- Eurasian Magpie** *Pica pica* Common throughout.
- Red-billed Chough** *Pyrhcorax pyrrhcorax* Common throughout with some large flocks of up to c.300 noted.
- Alpine Chough (Yellow-billed C)** *Pyrhcorax graculus* Noted at Ulley and Hemis NP.
- Northern Raven (Common R)** *Corvus corax* One at Choglamsar and two en route to Ulley Valley.
- Cinereous Tit (Grey T)** *Parus cinereus* Noted around our hotel in Leh.
- Eurasian Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes* Noted at Choglamsar and in Hemis NP. Ssp *neglectus*.
- Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria* One for Mike only at Spango Valley. (LO)
- Black-throated Thrush** *Turdus atrogularis* Four near Shey.
- Güldenstädt's Redstart** ◊ (White-winged R) *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus* Abundant in the Indus Valley.
- White-throated Dipper** *Cinclus cinclus* Noted at Hemis NP of the rare dark morph *sordidus*. Ssp *Cashmeriensis*.
- Brown Dipper** *Cinclus pallasii* One for Paul at Ulley Valley. (NL)
- House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* Four at Choglamsar were the only ones noted.
- Tibetan Snowfinch** ◊ *Montifringilla adamsi* A flock of c.30 in Hemis NP.
- Robin Accentor** ◊ *Prunella rubeculoides* Noted only in Ulley Valley.
- Brown Accentor** ◊ *Prunella fulvescens* A small scatter of sightings, the first near Shey.



Red-fronted Serin, Hemis NP (Mike Watson).

White Wagtail (Masked W) *Motacilla [alba] personata* Common in the Indus Valley and one at Ulley Valley.

Plain Mountain Finch ◊ *Leucosticte nemoricola* One sighting of three in Hemis NP.

Brandt's Mountain Finch ◊ (Black-headed M F) *Leucosticte brandti* Common in Hemis NP with a max. of c.300.

Streaked Rosefinch ◊ (Eastern Great R) *Carpodacus rubicilloides* Only noted at Ulley but no red males sadly.

Red-fronted Serin ◊ (Fire-fronted S) *Serinus pusillus* Noted in Ulley Valley and Hemis NP.

Mammals

Woolly Hare *Lepus oiostolus* One seen in Ulley Valley.

Snow Leopard *Panthera uncia* Six sightings: four in Ulley (including a mother and two cubs) and two in Hemis NP.

Grey Wolf *Canis lupus* Three sightings in Ulley Valley, involving a total of 16 wolves.

Siberian Ibex *Capra sibirica* Up to 39 counted in Ulley Valley.

Urial *Ovis vignei* A total of 52 seen en route to Ulley Valley.

Bharal (Blue Sheep) *Pseudois nayaur* Commonly seen in Hemis NP.



Finally I would like to thank everyone who made this tour such a success from our enthusiastic group to 'Mr Snow Leopard', Jigmet Dadul and his amazing team. We are looking forward to returning again next year!